

Westmont College The Horizon

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Black History Month— Thoughts on politics, spiritual likeness & Republican efforts

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Sunday marked the beginning of America's celebration of African American History Month.

The President will make a proclamation extolling the contributions of African Americans to this country, Congress will pass meaningless resolutions honoring African American artists, politicians, scientists, sports figures and civil rights leaders, and the cable news networks will have talking heads debate the need, meaning, and significance of setting aside the second month of the year to recognize how African Americans have bettered our nation.

These motions, though important in the way they reflect the richness of America's culture, do not mean much. So instead I would like to tell how two of my experiences outside Westmont have taught me more meaningful ways to celebrate America's cultural heritage.

"Can I get a Witness?" - Last year I had the privilege of being on the Spring Break in the City core team. In Los Angeles we spent a lot of time with Pastor Carol Houston and the members of her church, Bethel Church of Unspeakable Joy in Watts, which is 99.9 percent African American.

Grouping our predominantly white Westmont contingent with her predominantly not-white congregation resulted in a dynamic, dare I say charismatic, expression of faith. This interaction was a truly remarkable interplay of faith and culture.

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In this context, rather than recognizing African Americans as the cultural 'other,' we recognized our spiritual likeness.

"Mr. Speaker I'd like to call your attention to..." - During the fall semester I was in Washington, D.C. interning in the House Republican Policy Committee. I became well acquainted with the office supply store, the snack machines in the sub-basement, and the other interns who like me were dutiful, officious, and single; and unlike me, female.

Anyway, my main task was to do research for a civil rights calendar that would feature a Republican civil rights accomplishment for every day of the year. That's right, every day of the year.

Stop laughing; you would be surprised at some of the things I found out. The nation's first African American (and, for the most part, female and Asian American) congressmen, senators, governors, mayors, ambassadors, presidential candidates, and secretaries of education, transportation, etc. were Republicans.

The civil rights amendments following the Civil War and later school desegregation policies that provided African Americans equal footing under the law were introduced, supported, and ratified within the context of Republican governance and over the strenuous objections of Democrats. Many today confuse the president's cabinet briefings for a United Nations General Assembly meeting.

A factual look at the political history of race relations is important, but more often than not, the issue of race in politics invariably leads to a bizarre type of racial gerrymandering: boundaries are set and lines drawn to demarcate ownership of this or that civil rights accomplishment.

Politicos yammer, pander, and patronize about their accomplishments regarding race, all the while debasing what should be an honest and meaningful celebration of our country's tremendous progress with race and race relations.

Politics has its place, but let's leave it in that place. So this month let's take a different approach: because as Christians we know that there is truly no 'other' in the kingdom, through fellowship and worship let's rejoice in the diversity of God's creation, a "skin kaleidoscope" as "two honks and a Negro" (DC Talk) once referred to it .